1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

attached to them. Millet is the source of food for almost eight months, extending from September to April. The same applies to barley, which is the food crop during summer. Wheat bread is a delicacy enjoyed now and again, and usually connected with festival and religious occasions. It is also the crop that provides mainly the substance, with the addition of chicken or pigeons, of mutual food gifts on events of marriage, birth and circumcision, as well as the bread that is to be offered to guests. It is also wheat that is normally sold in the market, or exchanged for goods in the shop. Hence the season for weddings and circumcision ceremonies falls only after the harvest of wheat, when it is abundant in the village. More than in any other seed, the villagers are deeply interested in the price of wheat. The price of wheat is the first topic a villager returning from town will discuss with his people who will be all too eager to listen. In an often-heard argument between a cloth-merchant and a farmer, the latter, in attempting to reduce the price of the cloth, will retort to the merchant, 'Do you know how much wheat is worth?'

In connection with food, the writer recalls a tentative suggestion to one of the villagers that one could have a meal without bread, to which the horrified man immediately replied, 'There is no Strength, nor Might save with Allah! May God preserve this bliss for us.' He then enquired how one could get filled without bread. 'Certainly, bulkiness is one of the main things in a satisfactory meal, and nothing is more filling than loaves of bread.'

Bread is not only filling, but also possesses an aura of sacredness, being believed to be the essence of life. The name given to bread is 'aish' which literally means life. It is profane to put bread on the ground, and every effort must be made to pick up any crumb that falls to the ground for fear of it being trodden on.[1] Bread, like written words on paper, which might contain something from the Koran, must be respected. Before mother sweeps the house, children go looking for pieces or crumbs of bread or bits of paper with writing on them, and either give them to birds or goats in the former case or put them in the fire in the case of paper. Children are also enjoined to kiss bread if it falls from their hands on the ground, and if they find it lying in the street to remove it into a crevice in the wall. They are punished if they throw bread from their hands when angry or annoyed, as this might make the 'baraka' fly from the house.

Another deep incentive for work is the desire to emulate and attract social approval. The belief of the villager that nobody, at least in his village, is intrinsically better than any other person, gives him a feeling that all are equal. The strength of the impulse for emulation is clearly expressed in some of their often-repeated maxims: 'Without emulation the world would not have been populated and developed', 'Even com-

[1] Something similar to this has been mentioned by E. W. Lane, which he describes as 'The excessive and unreasonable respect of the Egyptians for bread', *Manners and Customs*, p. 190.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
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good as the village reciter, this being justified on the grounds that the 'village girl is always one-eyed'. Introduction of cash crops like sugar-cane and cotton has caught on for the same reasons as landlords who can afford to live in the city grow such crops. Emulation of city standards for social prestige is obvious in the example of those few people who white-washed their houses mainly on the outside but seldom inside, in contrast to the dark grey colour of mud, the ordinary house coating. The same whitewash with inscriptions from the Koran concerning pilgrimage, crude paintings of camels, and mahmal procession also form the outside decoration of the houses of pilgrims made immediately after their return from Mecca.

While some articles of men's wear or some parts of their speech have been affected by city ways, women's dress and language have hardly been affected at all. This is partly due to their relative restriction of movement and travel compared with men. On some occasion, there was a commotion in the village concerning the spread of city headgear among the women. This led to their nightly itinerary to fill their jars from the Nile being stopped for a while, as the men complained that women made it an occasion for displaying their colourful headgear.

The villagers appreciate the fact that city dwellers are much more inclined to mind their own business and engage in no gossip. Their attitude towards gossip is, however, paradoxical. It is considered sinful to talk about somebody behind his back; the Koran condemns it, and the Prophetic Tradition warns against it as 'gossip eats up the good deeds as the fire eats up wood'. Much of the village preacher's advice in the Friday sermon is on the avoidance of gossip and the use of the human tongue which could be like the scorpion's tail. Yet on the other hand, the villagers in their formal and informal gatherings occupy themselves with talking about the doings, the problems, the quarrels, and the general business of other people. They will tell you that they are engaged in just having a mouthful of words, or just chewing the cud. It is well known that gossip is almost an institution in rural areas, partly informative, partly interpretive, and on the whole functions as a means of social control and a medium for the formation of public opinion. In this connection, my informant Ali told me that townspeople have more scope for piety, as the occasions for gossip do not arise as among the people of Silwa.

One of the main things that a small number of enlightened villagers are aware of is the fact that in the cities people can find more religious enlightenment as to what are the principles of pure religion in distinction from religion mixed with pre-Islamic customs (Jahilyia), which they think are prevalent in the village. On enquiring about examples of the supremacy of the chances of the city dwellers over the villagers in this respect, most of the information elicited concerned religious ritual. Ali, as well as other persons, stated that city people know how to perform their ablutions better, how to say their prayers in a more acceptable way, and have no mourning

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Little girls have a perfectly free life until they reach marriageable age, when their freedom is somewhat more restricted. After marriage they are still more secluded, but the degree of seclusion varies, being rather stricter among the better-class peasants than among those of lower social status. Among the latter there may be considerable freedom of intercourse between the sexes. It must be remembered that there are quite definite social grades among the *fellāḥīn*, the lines of demarcation being very strongly em-

FIG. 14. A MOTHER WITH HER CHILDREN

phasized. For instance, in a family well known to me the women are not allowed to speak freely to the men, and, with the exception of the elderly mother, none of the females are allowed to enter a room in which male visitors may be seated, and even the mother does not appear unless there is something which renders her presence necessary. One of the women in this family is a widow of about thirty years of age, possibly a little older, and her brother objects to her even being seen walking in the streets of their village, except when she goes, accompanied by her mother, to get the water for household use or for some other necessary purpose. He told me that if he allowed her to be seen walking about in public

THE FELLĀḤĪN OF UPPER EGYPT

562 places his family would at once lose their position, and they would
565 be looked down upon as nobodies. To our Western ideas such
521 restrictions are apt to be regarded as a form of tyranny, but it is
577 not a fair judgment. Seclusion is partly a sign of respect among Egyptians, and indicates the value that the men put upon their womenfolk. Most of the women have unfortunately a difficult and
181 dangerous temperament, which, until they have learnt self-control,
562 and have been inspired with higher ideals, makes them anything
152 but an elevating influence in village society.

Though theoretically they are supposed to be entirely in sub-
562 jection to the male sex, in practice they can, and often do, maintain
593 a very firm hold on their husbands. I have known many men who are in mortal terror of their wives. Indeed, I am often inclined to think that it is the poor oppressed Egyptian *man* who has a claim to my sympathy, and that the over-ruled, oppressed wife is somewhat of a myth.

583 More often than not a man marries a girl from his own village, the favourite marriage being with a daughter of his father's brother. On the smallest provocation, some imagined slight, for
593 example, a girl will run off to her father's or brother's house, and
578 remain there until her husband, from fear of mischief being made against him in the village by his wife's relations, is induced to agree to do whatever his wife demands of him. She may require him to buy her gold earrings, a nose-ring, an anklet, or fine clothes, and, though a poor man, he may feel obliged to purchase one or
[406] more of these articles for fear of what his wife may do. Many men have run into debt for such reasons.

586 A man of my acquaintance, who owns a certain amount of land
428 and is by way of being one of the rather superior people of his
581 village, divorced his wife a year or two ago. She was quite a decent woman, but, her relations being poor, she had no land of her own, and, moreover, her husband's brother had died, bequeathing his widow a *feddān* (acre) of land and a little money. My acquaintance had his eye on this land, which was family property, belonging originally to his father, and the only way he could obtain it was by marrying his brother's widow. He did not want to have two wives, for
[595] it is expensive to keep up such an establishment ; also, monogamy is becoming much more common in Egypt, and to have more than one wife is looked upon as rather barbarous even among the peasants. The only thing to do was to get rid of his first wife.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
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far as I know, from private individuals. It is very different in England, where the hospitals for children and adults alike are supported by voluntary contributions. It is not that charity is lacking in Egypt—far from it; but for *organized* charity such as we have in England there is a crying need.

It is not altogether surprising, considering the state of ignorance in which they exist, that the mental outlook of most of the villagers is low. As far as the women are concerned, there is nothing to raise it. Sexual matters form the chief topic of their conversation, and this has a most degrading effect both on them and on their children, before whom they discuss the most private matters without the slightest reserve. Thus the children from their very early years hear subjects spoken of and joked about in a manner that is most revolting to educated people. What chance have the children in such circumstances of growing up into pure-minded men and women? I am told (for such conversation rarely takes place in my presence) that the women are far greater offenders in this respect than the men, who usually refrain from discussing their wives with outsiders. Whether this is true or not I am not in a position to say, but at any rate the children, and especially the girls, who are more constantly with their mothers than the boys, hear the most private sexual matters openly discussed, and in such a way as to poison their minds at the very outset of their lives. Marriage is, of course, the one and only aim in life among the girls, and the desire to get a husband is encouraged in every way by the mothers. It is quite a pitiful sight to see a little girl decked out in all the jewellery she can muster, dressed in a gaily coloured frock decorated with beads and jangles (Fig. 17), and with a veil drawn coquettishly across her face, standing about the village street, or outside the house, obviously on the look-out to attract some man. In all this they are aided and abetted by their mothers, who regard it as a compliment to themselves as well as to their daughters if the latter are sought after as wives at an early age. The Egyptian Government is endeavouring to prohibit the very early marriages which have been usual in the past, and there is now a law forbidding a girl to marry till she is sixteen and a boy till he is eighteen. However, in small, out-of-the-way villages the law has been disobeyed to my certain knowledge in more than one case. False ages were, I suppose, given to the *ḳāḍi*, as the man who draws up the marriage contracts is called; and he, in view of the fee he

of Egypt in 1937 there were 7,947,193 men to 7,957,332 women. As nearly everyone marries, the inference is obvious. It may be, too, that Moslem customs have been counteracted to some extent by natural law and by Christian influence as represented in the Coptic family. In any case, years of work and suffering together, children, and a wife's good care create an almost unbreakable bond.

The temperament of the fellaheen, especially of the women, is very ardent and sensual. Marriage is to them less an affair of love than one of sexual attraction and reproduction.

The fellah's wife usually enjoys better health than her husband, who is weakened by bilharzia. She is younger, and despite Islam has had considerable freedom in her own affairs since the most ancient times. Village tradition requires on pain of death that she should be physically a virgin when she marries, but mentally she has ceased to be so long before. Since childhood she has been aware of her parents' intercourse, which is quite open owing to lack either of privacy or of modesty. The conversation of the women, even before young girls, turns often on these subjects, not perhaps viciously, but certainly without restraint. They tell each other of the charms and stratagems with which to please and hold their menfolk.

The men, who are more reserved and by their way of life utterly materialistic, understand only sexual love. They revel in it, each with his own wife, and are kept faithful less by virtue than by village law. Adultery leads immediately to bloodshed, and prostitutes are beyond their means.

The heat of passion is short-lived. At thirty a fellah woman is no longer attractive, but the children she has borne her husband bind him to her. Both want children above everything else. To the wife they mean social prestige, for barrenness is a disgrace and the chief cause of polygamy and divorce (**). To the father they represent helpers and successors, who will allow him to rest and give orders. Accordingly families are large. The average number of children is five, and this presupposes eight to ten births. The older they grow the more important does the mother become.

Another thing that binds the man to his wife is her wisdom and authority, which are often greater than his. A fellah proverb has it that 'Man is a river, woman a dyke'.

ness ; but these defects are due to his servitude and isolation. In the words of El-Kolâly, his mind is walled-in between ignorance and tyranny. (*)

Moreover the soil and the care of the soil make the fellah patient, long-suffering and hard. The soil has imprinted on him something of its own earthiness. His very love is entirely physical, and yet he is not immoral.

He is taught from childhood that he comes from his mother's womb. His bad language when he is angry shows how much he knows of sexual matters. Even girls playing with dolls enact scenes of perfect realism. But this calm animal shamelessness has nothing in common with obscenity. Fundamental morality is not affected by it. The fact that everybody is watching everybody else, together with the conservative temperament and instinctive modesty of the fellaheen, makes offences against morals fewer than elsewhere. As El-Kolâly says, 'Among the fellaheen offences against morality represent only a small proportion of the total'.

Poverty and tradition inure the fellah from his early days to the lack of all bodily ease. A comfortable bed, a pleasant home life, a good table, light company — these are things beyond his grasp. Their absence safeguards his morality. So do the precepts of Islam, it might be added ; but the fellaheen are very ignorant of their religion, and the Sheikhs and Ulema do little to teach them. It is more probable that among these primitive people natural morality keeps its original force.

The fellaheen are moral because they believe in God. They are material, but not materialistic. They believe wholeheartedly in the intervention and providence of God. It is always "*In sha Allah*" — if it is God's will. They make no plan, undertake nothing without adding "*In sha Allah*".

A Greek merchant says to a fellah, "You'll bring me your cotton, then, tomorrow ?"

"Yes, *ya khawâga*, (*) *in sha Allah*."

"Five cantars, not less. You understand ?"

"Yes, *in sha Allah*."

"You'll be able to find the camels for them ?"

"*In sha Allah*."

"I must have the goods before midday."

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
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78.

A Ready Answer.

539 312 462 521

In the morning the women and girls come to the river-bank, to draw water with their Balāliṣ (singular ballāṣ), the well-known, and characteristic water-jars. This is always accompanied by much jesting and talking.

Here a young man teases the girls (ll. 1—2) and they give him a ready answer (ll. 3—4).

Ya banāt, yalli betimlu,
kira-l-mōrade kam?
ʿAšara min abu ṭ[illegible]
we-bōse min taḥt el-ḥuzām.

"You girls who are drawing water,
How much is the rent of the watering-place?"
"Ten of 'those with the window'
And a kiss under the nose-ring."

[177] [436] 3. The peasants call the escutcheon on the back of European coins, a "window". Thus the people distinguish the English sovereigns: "abu-š-šibbâk" = "father of the window" and "abu-l-ḥuṣān" = "father of the horse". The latter are, besides, more popular among the peasants. In our song of course no small coin is meant.

[301] [264] 4. The nose-ring is usually put through the right side of the nose, and its pendants hang down over the mouth, so that in order to put anything into the mouth, they must be held aside.

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

127.

Disobedient.

539x
521
593

A young wife, against the express command of her husband — very pretty women are kept at home — has gone again at daybreak, to the river, to chat with her former companions, who have come to draw water (see No. 78). Meanwhile sunrise draws nearer and she urges the return home, in order that her husband may not discover her absence.

Ya banāt imlu u-šīlu,
la-n-nahār yiṭla' 'alēye.
Ḫēfe min maḥbūbi yilā'îni,
Sīdi u-mḥarrag 'alēye.

O girls, fill and carry away,
That the day may not surprise me.
I fear, that my beloved may meet me.
He is my master and has forbidden me.

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

CHAPTER III.

WORKING DAYS AND HOLIDAYS, DAYS OF JUBILEE AND DAYS OF MOURNING.

WORKING-DAY LIFE OF THE COMMON PEOPLE.

In Upper Egypt the life of the ordinary inhabitant of the towns is passed in a simple and uniform manner. Before sunrise he leaves his couch, performs the morning ablutions enjoined by his religion, and repeats his early prayer. To say his morning prayer after sunrise is forbidden by the ordinances of his religion, and to allow the sun to rise above one's slumbering head is universally regarded as prejudicial to health. He then drinks his cup of coffee and smokes his pipe, either at home or in the public coffee-house. His breakfast, which he takes after his coffee (though sometimes before it), consists of the remains of his meal of the previous evening, or of cakes and milk, or for a trifle he procures from the market the ever ready national dish of *ful*, that is, stewed beans. He then engages in his vocations, buys, sells, writes, works, or moves about, all in the most comfortable, quiet, and deliberate manner. "What is not done to-day may be to-morrow"—in good Arabic, *bokra in shah Allah* (to-morrow if God please)—stands written on his forehead in large letters. The most urgent affairs leave always a quarter of an hour free in which to gossip with acquaintances over coffee and a pipe, be it in retail-shop, workshop, or office. And if many acquaintances turn up the more numerous grow these quarters-of-an-hour. Now and again he has no work, or no desire to do it, and then he drags himself from one friend to the other. Bread for himself and his family will no doubt turn up; *robinna kerim*—"the Lord is gracious (or liberal);" it is but little he requires, and in case of necessity his soft-hearted neighbour will not allow him to go supperless to bed. Even before the mid-day call of the muezzin from the minaret, he

[p. 158]

[pp. 1-157 not processed]

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
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gather his friends around him for a social meeting in the evening. The light of the moon and stars suffices, or if in winter they must retreat into the dark chamber, the weak glimmer of an oil-lamp. In this country nothing is known of nocturnal labours either of hand or head even among the learned, and the many blind and blear-eyed people that here wander about have not contracted their ailments through overstraining their eyes. As to-day is, so is to-morrow, and the most momentous events passing in the great world here make on most people no impression whatever. For it is only a very few that receive a newspaper, and still fewer understand it, partly because its language is too fine, and therefore not suited to the mass, partly because the necessary previous knowledge of every kind is absent. Among the ancient Egyptians the common people, such as artisans, were forbidden under severe penalties to mingle in politics. It is only the most urgent necessity that causes the citizen to take a journey, and when he does travel he makes a pilgrimage to Meccah, or, at most, goes to some other country in which Islam prevails. For in the land of the Franks something would every instant come into collision with his ideas and customs; he would have to eat, if not swine's flesh, yet dishes in which swine's fat forms an ingredient; he would have to eat carrion (that is, the flesh of animals strangled, and not slaughtered with an invocation to God); he would not have the proper conditions for the performance of his religious duties, such as his ablutions and prayer five times a day, nor any mosque or muezzin. If he ever happens to have been in Europe, or even in a town in which the Frankish mode of life prevails, he never ceases to tell his countrymen of the ridiculous and preposterous things he saw there, of course not without admitting that there was much good also, especially if there be a Frank among his audience. The ancient Egyptians had a still stronger prejudice and fanaticism against foreign people and foreign things.

LIFE OF THE WOMEN.

Though the members of the opposite sex certainly do not

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
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special dainty on this day. Saturday is named "the Sabbath of the light," from the celebrated sacred fire, which on this day bursts forth in the Greek Church of the Sepulchre at Jerusalem, and on this account the Christian brethren there annually get up a spectacle, which often terminates in deadly blows and renders the intervention of the Turkish, and consequently Mohammedan soldiery necessary. On this day the Mohammedan faithful strengthen their eyes with eye-powders; everybody has a vein opened, or gets himself cupped, a custom which prevails in many places in the West also, and in Egypt, Mohammedan as it is, coloured Easter eggs are also eaten. People take *kishk*, that is, a decoction of wheat with sourmilk, boil it with eggs, and stick it with the coloured shells of the eggs above the doors to adorn the entrance for all time coming and ward off spirits. On Easter Sunday the "great feast of the Christians" (*id en-nusára*) these hold a grand reception, with sherbet and holiday gifts, the Mohammedans in a friendly and neighbourly way call upon the Christians as the latter did upon them during Bairam. The Easter Monday of the Copts, whose festivals are settled by the Greek calendar, is the universal spring festival for the adherents of both religions. The night before onions, beans, and a bouquet of roses are laid under the bed-cushions and slept upon. On Easter Monday the onions are crushed and stuck with some water on the door; the beans are stuck on the bar, and the roses are used as a nosegay. At the first streak of daylight everybody moves abroad, this being the day of *shimm en-nesim*, that is, "air-smelling," or more poetically "sipping the zephyr." People go to the gardens or other attractive spots, and pass, if possible, the whole day there. At the most-frequented places sellers of coffee, sherbet, buza, and cooked meats establish themselves. A company of friends may take an Easter lamb with them, kill it at the rendezvous they have selected, and prepare *tanur*, that is, they cut up the meat in several pieces and bake it in an improvised earth-oven; or they make *shauirma*, that is, the whole lamb with the skin and hair on is placed on a spit and roasted at the fire. The day is spent

[796] [778] [826] [757] [789] [574] [805] [788] [943] [252] [521] [526]

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
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796 [521] [526] in conversation, ball playing, and gymnastic exercises, and those whose conscience allows it smell the contents of their dram-bottle as well as the fresh air and roast meat. Health must be inhaled to-day since the five days' period of terror, 753 796 [796] the time of the *chamasin*, is now at hand. A serpent then wanders over the earth and infects the atmosphere with its poisonous breath, leaving behind small-pox, plague, cholera ("the yellow wind"), and all other varieties of disease. The curse is not removed till Whitsuntide dissolves it.

THE NIGHT OF THE DROP.

796 873 On the 17th of June a "drop" falls (according to the ancients a tear of Isis) into the decreasing waters of the Nile, and impregnates the wonderful stream. Its effect is soon after observed in the dirtier colour of the water, then in its more rapid flow, and lastly in its increase and overflow. On this day, or on the night, the "night of the drop," young and old flock to the banks of the blessed stream.

THE NERUS DAY.

541 On the 10th September, the first day of the Coptic solar year, the river has reached to about its highest point, and on this day—the *nerûs*, the people give themselves up to the pleasures of the carnival. For three days it is all up with the rule of the Turks; every little town chooses for itself in its own way, and from its own midst, a ruler (*abu nerus*), who has a towering fool's cap set upon his head, and a long spectral beard of flax fastened to his chin, and is clothed in a peculiar garment. With a long sceptre in his hand, and followed by a crowd of correspondingly-dressed bailiffs, hangmen, and scribes, he promenades the streets and turns his steps straight to the hall of the chief magistrate. Every one bends before him, the guards at the door make way, the governor of the province or of the town has the humour to let himself be ousted, while the new dignitary seats himself on his throne and holds a most rigorous criminal investiga-